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ABSTRACT

At the College of St. Thomas (Minnesota), both an undergraduate and graduate business program requiring advanced language study and study abroad were developed. Administrative support for the program, support for faculty specializing in business language, and careful planning have helped to avoid anticipated problems. Language department harmony has been maintained, but some conflict has occurred between language and business faculty. The greatest current problem is identifying fully qualified new faculty. Recently, the college has begun projects in cooperation with West Germany's University of Paderborn, which has similar programs in both economics and business administration in which English language study is required. Academic achievement in the program and participation in study abroad programs have been highly satisfactory. Problems encountered in the German program include large classes, difficulty recruiting qualified personnel, and lack of instructional materials. Two studies of the use of English for special purposes and English for economics in major German enterprises clearly documents the need for this specialized language instruction, but the efforts of higher education institutions to fill the need are very limited to date. A more integrative approach is recommended in both the United States and Germany. (MSE)

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BUSINESS LANGUAGE ON TWO CONTINENTS

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BUSINESS LANGUAGE ON TWO CONTINENTS

Paul A. Schons and Hermann Fink

The department of foreign languages at the College of St. Thomas introduced a sequence in international business at the undergraduate level 15 years ago. At that time the department of business was indifferent to such a program and participated with benign neglect. Approximately 7 years ago as the AACSB began to stress the international aspect of business, the department of business indicated interest in the international business major and in cooperation with the department of foreign languages, introduced a second track with a greater emphasis in business but still requiring advanced study in language and a year of study abroad. By 1989 the two tracks involve approximately 225 undergraduate majors.

Four years ago the MBA program in cooperation with the department of foreign languages introduced an MIM (Master of International Management) program. The MIM requires advanced level work in business language, cross cultural communications , political economy and courses in management, marketing and finance with a strong international focus. In this program the majority of the 300 graduate students are working adults who take the coursework in an evening

sequence. Work experience of the students ranges from two years to twenty years with an average of about five years. Significant numbers of students come to the program with positions involving international responsibility, desiring to enhance their understanding and skills in the international arena. Increasing numbers of students come to the program from outside of the United States, wishing to learn international business skills within the American market area.

The prob[illegible] experienced in our programs have in some cases been similar to those of similar programs at other institutions and in others been rather different:
Although concern has frequently been expressed at these conferences that promotion and tenure might be more difficult to achieve for persons specializing in business language, we have not experienced this as a problem. (1) The College of St. Thomas has a very large business department and is accustomed to granting promotions and tenure in the field of business. (2) The Chairman of the department of foreign languages has himself been very interested in the field and has from the beginning offered support in this area. (3) The department has avoided making appointments with specialization solely in businss language -- each instructor has a second specializatio in a traditional language area, thus gaining a certain "respectability" in the eyes of more traditionally oriented faculty on the department tenure committee.

We have, after the first few years, not been perceived as a threat by professors teaching literature although the vast majority of the department's students do choose the international business track. The reason for departmental harmony in this regard is the philosophy that courses in literature, culture and linguistics, are an important part of the students' preparation along with specialized courses in business language and current events. Thus the size and frequency of literature and culture courses has grown with the numbers of students majoring in international business.

We have experienced a certain problem of "socialization" within the MIM program. Business professors teaching at the graduate level seem to be highly "self-confident" and experience a certain difficulty in accepting their language colleagues as full partners. We find we must frequently emphasize the fact that the language courses required in the program are in fact business content courses which happen to be taught in languages other than English. Passing time seems to be smoothing difficulties in this area.

The greatest problem we face at this time is identifying persons fully qualified for new appointments in the field. We insist on extensive background in business in the language area to be taught, preferably with some experience working in industry. Of course we insist on language proficiency. We

desire people with a second specialization in a traditional language/literature area and we desire the completed Ph.D. We are most interested in persons who will engage in research and publication, but who are also interested in extensive interaction with businesses in the region. At the same time we seek people with a strong commitment to teaching per se. It has been our experience that the pool of such persons is not great.

Approximately two years ago we began projects in cooperation with a similar program at the University of Paderborn in West Germany. Paderborn has a program very similar to our own and we have found a number of areas of common interest and opportunities for mutual support. Professor Hermann Fink is the Chair of the department of English for economics at that university. In the commentary following, he outlines some of the difficulties, successes, similarities and differences in the experience of teaching a foreign language for business purposes in Europe.

* * *

By coincidence, Dr. Schons and I, in 1987, were able to discover and identify similar conditions, interests, and difficulties but also strong deviations between the situations at the College of St. Thomas and the University of Paderborn.

Sixteen years ago, the University of Paderborn decided to institutionalize a Department of English within its large Department of Economics and Business Administration to cater to the specialized foreign language needs of the students. The main objectives were those of preparing the students for the study of foreign textual material and international study, as well as for professional work in industry and the civil service after graduation. At the same time, the department - so far the first and only one in the Federal Republic to do so - introduced a two-semester English language requirement ("Introduction to the English Terminology of Economics and Business Administration I and II") for all its students. This requirement builds on the seven years of English language instruction commonly expected of German secondary school leavers and terminates in a written pre-diploma examination of 120 minutes consisting of:

- 40 English economic/business terms to be defined in the foreign language;
- about 10 - 15 questions on two or three unknown economic/-business texts of approximately 200 - 250 words each, taken from economic/business textbooks, journals, reviews, etc., and four (4) out of 6 - 8 topics on contemporary economic and/or business issues largely drawing on the textual material studied in the lectures during the two semesters.

Under German law such examinations may be taken only three times. Failing a third time precludes the student from studying economics or business administration at a German university. The failure rate in this examination fluctuates between 22 and 65 percent.

Due to adequate texts not being available and in order to stimulate interest by actuality, a new selection of roughly 15 - 20 pages of printed texts from a variety of economic sub-disciplines is prepared each semester and printed by the departmental student representation for distribution at a nominal fee; one set of a presumably lesser degree of difficulty for the first semester. Lectures during the first semester are divided into an exclusively monolingual 45-minute presentation of a stock of approximately 1.000 to 1.500 economic/business terms and the concepts they denote or connote, and a 45-minute period of textual analysis. While the lectures focus primarily on listening and reading comprehension, they also aim at developing oral proficiency to the extent possible.

In the fall of 1988 the department had a total enrollment of about 3,200 students of which approximately 750 first-semester students should have attended the basic two-term courses in English for Economists (EfE).

In addition, English was entered into the curriculum of the

MA degree courses for both branches (as a tradition, the German university still makes an attempt at separating economics from business administration) as one of the required elective or minor fields of study and examination.

If chosen,EfE forms part of the oral examination (30 minutes per field) and the MA thesis may be written in English. Courses required are:

1. Lecture: Great Britain, history, economic, social, political and educational background and modern developments
2. Lecture: The USA, history .....
3. Seminar: Advanced terminology from selected disciplines of economics and business administration I
4. Seminar: Advanced terminology from selected disciplines...II
5. Seminar on a wide range of possible topics, e.g. Economic Thinking in the American Novel; Economic Aspects of the "Pursuit of Happiness"; Economics and the Concept of Success in America; Development of a Glossary of Economic and Business Terms; Contemporary Issues of the US; Contemporary Issues of Business English upon the German language; etc..
6. Colloquium for exam candidates.

Approximately one third of the students in the department

take EfE courses on the advanced level annually (about 200 students), about 35 candidates per year choose EfE as a minor in the comprehensive final examinations, roughly 20 candidates write their thesis in English on economic topics relating to the English speaking world. Results in terms of academic achievement, enhanced by participation in the department's exchange programs with the USA and Britain, have been excellent. In all cases of equal formal diploma qualification, graduates with EfE training and minor field examinations were given preference by employers.

Based on the English experience similarly comprehensive programs which, at this time, are staffed by a full professor (chair), a full-time lecturer (18 hours of teaching), four members of the university's Department of Languages and Literature on part-time assignment, three part-time instructors (6 semester hours each), eight students tutors, one part-time secretary and three student assistants (19 hours each per week). Still, the program has been chronically understaffed and the classes have been too large. Although the chair and the program are part of the Department of Economics and Business Administration (EBA), the languages and literature department has persistently viewed them as something exotic, as a nuisance but perhaps also with envy. At times of large enrollments in teacher training, colleagues in the languages argued that no staff was available to support the EfE program, that they felt insufficiently

competent to teach in it, that they simply were not interested, or that they considered working in it below their professorial dignity or at least unscientific and unscholarly. With dwindling student numbers in their areas, however, they would now like to capitalize statistically on the many students by integrating EfE into their department. Consequently, a major problem has been that of recruiting qualified personnel, above all such teachers who are willing and motivated to venture not only into the teaching of the foreign language to non-language majors but also into a certain measure of teaching the respective scientific fields. This requires a double competence rarely found with applicants. In many cases, such teachers of foreign languages for special purposes (FLSP) "are required to work at a level which exceeds that of popularization and frequently other than their mother tongue (and this is the 'norm')" (Balboni,P., LGP versus LSP; Which Way to the Razor's Edge?, unesco Alsed-LSP Newsletter, 9, No. 1 (22) May 1986, pp.2-8). The fact that, for instance, in our case the instructor will have to teach a certain measure of economics and/or business administration in addition to the foreign language is frequently ignored (unwittingly, of course) by the colleagues in the respective scientific disciplines but also by the language departments. To achieve this dual competency is time-taking and cannot be done without a strong interest in and commitment to the area of application of the foreign language. As a result FLSP cannot be taught as is mostly the

case by teachers who feel compelled to do so because their linguistic or literary specializations are not in demand and thus attempt to impose "some language" upon the non-linguistic academic fields. This, in my opinion, is the consequence of the "modernization" and "innovation" movement frequently found to exist in the traditional foreign language departments. On the contrary, teaching, for instance, English or German or French for economists or businesses requires that the foreign language be integrated into the field and not - whether traditional teachers like it or not - the incorporation of the scientific discipline into a given language system which is heavily predetermined by the language teacher. This, in some way, subordinates FLSP to the content matter of the specific scientific discipline and might, at a first glance, be regarded as debasing the academic and scholarly importance of language. Yet, this same approach makes the foreign language the essential and vital vehicle of communication in that discipline and, thus, indispensable. For this approach, however, adequately trained teachers are still lacking. As we concluded after a 1988 analysis of the state-of-the-art in German secondary schools, economic and business texts, too, convey elements of civilization and culture and contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the respective language community in the same way as there is scarcely a novel or short story that does not harbor somewhere economic and business aspects. The solution, therefore, rather seems to lie in the togetherness

and combination of the two sides, of the culturally desirable and the pragmatically advisable, than in their mutual elimination or exclusion.

Another difficulty encountered is that of the unavailability of adequate FLSP teaching materials. Most language-of-business or -economics courses focus on what I would rather consider basic and primitive performance and skills such as making a telephone call, writing an invoice, or placing an order in the foreign language. Many books still use the stereotype phraseologies of old and promote a stilted, mechanical, bureaucratic diction and style not infrequently for use by secretaries who are being misused as translators. The sometimes humorous but more often embarrassing results are known to all of us. We consider FLSP to be more than that. Hence, our attempt at up-grading qualitatively and at at raising quantitatively the level of such teaching in our university, an endeavor for which, however, the saying still holds true that nothing is so good that it cannot be improved.

In 1986 and 1988, we conducted studies on ESP and EfE in (1) major German enterprises (H. Fink, K. Anderson, W. Rothfritz, "Management ohne Wirtschaftsenglisch?", WiSt, 3 (March) 1988, pp. 151-154, (2) secondary schools (H. Fink, W. Rothfritz, "Wirtschaftsenglisch in Beruf, Studium und Schule", in print, 1988) and (3) universities and

Fachhochschulen (h. Fink, W. Rothfritz, "Wirtschaftswissenschaft ohne Wirtschaftsenglish?", WiSt, 11, (Nov.) 1986, pp. 589-593). The results of these studies fully supported our claim:

- Nine out of ten major German business enterprises deemed a profound command at least of EfE an absolute must for upper managers and important for middle management. A second foreign language continues to become a requirement, a third one is highly desired.
- Two out of three enterprises declared the foreign language knowledge of today's graduates as insufficient.
- Almost one fifth indicated a profound knowledge of EfE to be an indispensable prerequisite, and over two thirds an increasingly important precondition for employment and promotion.

The majority of the heads of the language departments of German secondary schools polled was of the opinion that

- the schools could teach the general foreign language but scarcely its special-purpose vocabulary, style and content matter (80.) %);
- teachers of English have not been adequately trained to do so (93.3 %);
- the availability of EfE teaching materials is very limited (83.7 %);
- many teachers are not interested in teaching EfE and not willing to shed off their literary and linguistic tradition

and background for the benefit of a pragmatically oriented teaching of foreign languages and the survival of language departments.

Nine out of ten professors of economics and/or business administration and 85 percent of the students in these disciplines rate a good and sound knowledge of EfE as unrenouncable for their studies, employment and professional work.

One fourth of students believe to have been insufficiently and only one fourth to have been well prepared in secondary schools for later work in EfE.

Over a third of professors call for compulsory EfE courses during the basic program of study (first two years); far more than that number believe such courses should be introduced in the respective departments as options; exactly one half recommends the installation of EfE as a full elective and minor subject during the advanced program of study (last two to three years).

While our research clearly documents the need for EfE, the German universities only seem to begin to realize this necessity. To judge by the hesitating and isolated manner in which the language departments initiate measures and take action, they might be doing so only half-heartedly and under

the pressure of the threatening unemployment of their graduates. Only ten among the German universities which have full departments of business administration offer some form of EfE as a minor field in the final examination; the University of Paderborn still seems to be the only one to have a true EfE requirement for all students in this discipline as a recent report by the Informationsdienst der deutschen Industrie (Feb. 1989) indicates. As a conclusion, this report draws on our study of German industries and EfE and says: "For the time being, those enterprises that have not been so lucky as to come upon a graduate from one of those universities will have to live by the old saying of 'Help yourself'. Almost all big business companies have language courses for their employees - 83 percent of them on the company premises:. (Informationsdienst der deutschen Wirtschaft, Cologne, Feb. 1989). This indicates that the language departments still seem to be far from the integrative approach which I have portrayed here as the ideal foundation on which to build a cooperative and mutually beneficial system of FLSP and the general language with all the cultural implications the two language variants offer. The German school system has always viewed and supported foreign languages as a great and vital asset of education. This, as I know from many years of experience, has not necessarily been so in this country. The difficulties in and, more even, the necessity of teaching FLSP in the US in general and in American institutions of higher education in

particular seem to be much greater than in Europe. The comments which I was permitted to present to you so emphatically on EfE in West Germany hold equally true for German, French, Spanish or other foreign languages for economists and business people in the United States.

END

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